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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002330

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SUBJECT: IRAQ'S PRESIDENCY COUNCIL CHIEF: OPPORTUNITY OR STATUS QUO?

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha for reasons  
1.4 (b) & (d)

**¶1.** (C) Summary: The outgoing Secretary General of Iraq's Presidency Council (PC) is pessimistic that the PC can overcome its current dysfunctional, disjointed nature and develop into a professional administrative body. The incoming Secretary General promises develop the PC into a cross-sectarian, technocratic, professional body. This may be an opportunity to do just that. End Summary.

PC Lacks Support from President and VPs

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**¶2.** (C) As an institution, the Iraqi Presidency Council (PC) has suffered from a chronic lack of support from Iraq's President, Jalal Talabani (Kurd, PUK), and two Vice Presidents, Tariq al-Hashimi (Sunni, Iraqi Islamic Party ) IIP) and Adil Abdul Mehdi (Shia, Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq ) ISCI). For the past two years the Presidency Council's Secretary General has been Kamran Karadaghi, who simultaneously served as President Talabani's personal chief of staff. At the same time, the individual offices of Vice Presidents al-Hashimi and Abdul Mehdi have grown to hundreds of people, including political, security, legal, media and external relations advisors. As a result, developing the PC as an institution and using it as a tool to coordinate efforts between the President and two Vice Presidents has been a low priority.

**¶3.** (C) In May, President Talabani approved Naseer al-Ani (Sunni, IIP) as the PC's new Secretary General and designated the position as Ministerial-level. In meetings with Poloff, al-Ani's newly appointed chief of staff, Mohammed Shakir, a former senior advisor in al-Hashimi's office, stated al-Ani wants to develop the PC into a cross-sectarian resource with multiple departments focusing on media, policy and legislation. Outgoing Secretary General Karadaghi predicts that under al-Ani's leadership the Presidency Council will become a vehicle to push Sunni, specifically IIP, agendas. He noted that al-Ani has delegated most day-to-day functions to Shakir, creating anxiety and suspicion among remaining PC employees.

Background

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**¶4.** (C) Karadaghi has long lamented the poor cooperation among the staffs of the three PC members and the lack of a true institution of the Presidency that could cross sectarian lines and outlive the current administration. He has attempted to establish a PC secretariat to streamline decision-making. The idea did not gain traction, although such an institution was required, in his view, to facilitate rational administration of the workload and give credibility to the office. He envisioned a technocrat in charge of a staff unaffiliated with any particular political party or

individual. Karadaghi went as far as to draft legislation to establish such a secretariat, but was stymied by the PC itself.

Karadaghi: New SecGen Not an Improvement

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¶ 15. (C) Thus far cooperation within the PC under al-Ani has not improved, Karadaghi told Poloff, and he expressed pessimism that any positive change would take root on al-Ani's watch. He noted that, while the staffs of each presidency member have some interaction during day-to-day operations because they are currently occupying the same building, they are not communicating as an integrated office.

The problem could get worse -- Talabani's staff plan to move to the presidential compound in Jadriyah, ending their co-location. (Note: While some PC staffers are co-located in the Presidency office in the International Zone, Hashimi, Mehdi and Talabani rarely if ever visit. Many of their immediate staffers remain with them at their separate offices. End Note).

¶ 16. (C) Karadaghi predicts that al-Ani will take a partisan approach to staffing and fill his staff with Sunnis. He described the new Presidency office as an extension of the IIP, ripe for patronage. He observed that both Vice Presidents Hashimi and Mehdi have staffs of more than 100 people, while he functions with far fewer. Other members of Talabani's staff have been less critical than Karadaghi, but they have also told Poloff that the transition has not gone smoothly and that relations between the offices are somewhat troubled.

¶ 17. (C) Karadaghi claimed that Al-Ani spent much of his time dealing with his business interests in Dubai. He said Al-Ani

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had given his office manager Muhammad Shakir full authority to take decisions concerning the running of the office. He noted that al-Ani has insisted on being addressed as "Chairman Naseer" ) "chief of staff" was not a lofty enough title for him. Al-Ani saw his position as a political appointment and intended to treat it as such, a fact that appeared to disgust Karadaghi, who prided himself on non-partisanship and repeatedly has told Poloff he has served as the only communication link among the three presidency offices for the past year. This, he said, was because he was the only one that all sides could trust.

¶ 18. (C) Comment: The PC as an institution has been grossly underutilized due to a preference by Talabani, Mehdi and Hashimi to develop personal offices filled with employees loyal to particular parties or individuals. While Karadaghi's concerns are real, al-Ani has a reputation as a professional with whom Sunnis, Kurds, and Shia ) most notably Prime Minister Maliki ) are able to work. Karadaghi's less than flattering portrayal of al-Ani may be due in part to professional jealousy, instead of an objective prediction. Despite Karadaghi's pessimism, this may be an opportunity to for the PC staff to build a new type of governmental institution with technocrats from all of Iraq's communities. End Comment.

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